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Cambridge College Graduates 683 at 37th Commencement

CAMBRIDGE—Nearly 700 graduates celebrated the power of education at Cambridge College’s 37th Commencement on June 8th at the Bank of America Pavilion on Boston’s Waterfront. “Education has the power to transform and save lives,” said First Lady Diane B. Patrick during her Commencement address. “But I’ve learned that when little is expected, little is achieved.”

Mrs. Patrick said that education helped her husband, Governor Deval Patrick, change his path and save his life when he was a young teenager growing up in inner-city Chicago. Mrs. Patrick spoke about the low expectations that society holds for some of its children, insisting that these low expectations are responsible for the achievement gap in the United States. “Learned hopelessness is the feeling that nothing can change. When there is so little to suggest that one can succeed, he or she is tracked for failure. You are not the typical graduates; you have shown extraordinary discipline and strength. We celebrate you who have achieved despite barriers and potholes along the way. You can now speak about hope and teach hope to others,” she said. Mrs. Patrick charged the graduates to invoke a cycle of learned optimism, to teach children to look up, not down and to set their sights high, not low. “It only takes each of you to make a difference in one life. Our children need your help,” she added.

Cambridge College Professor and Coordinator of the College’s Juvenile Justice Program Carol Pepi echoed Mrs. Patrick’s remarks in her Charge to the Graduates: “In your greatness lies the promise to come and to bring change to a world that needs hope,” she said. “With privilege comes responsibility. You have the challenge of creating and sustaining systems that provide opportunity for all of its children.”

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The two student speakers also encouraged their fellow classmates to use their education to make a change. Mary L. Dorman (Master of Management in Health Care Administration), who was forced to end her career as a Registered Nurse when she was diagnosed with “an illness that changed her life,” said the College allowed her to accomplish a dream that she never thought was possible: to pursue a different path in the health care field. “Our degrees will allow us to walk out the door and make a difference,” she said.

FeLisa Walker (Bachelor of Science in Human Services) delivered a moving reflection that was met with a standing ovation. “We had to defer our dreams due to circumstances in life beyond our control, but we were allowed a second chance,” she said. “Where do we go from here? The answer is to spread your wings because the sky is the limit. We can use this degree for a purpose greater than our being. I think Cambridge College is all about change.”

First Lady Patrick and Raymond L. Handlan, the Senior Advisor of The Atlantic Philanthropies, both received an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters at the ceremony. “I know what you have gone through to get your education,” said Mr. Handlan. “Sometimes I didn’t think I would ever get my degree. I don’t feel as if I deserve this and I honor you who have earned yours.”

This year, the first group of candidates from the Doctor of Education program in Educational Leadership—the first terminal degree to be offered in the College’s 37-year history—were recognized during a special on-stage hooding. The emotion of the Commencement ceremony was enhanced when Cambridge native Phaedra Butler delivered an outstanding version of “Still I Rise,” dedicated to the Class of 2008.

Founded in 1971, Cambridge College is a private, non-profit institution dedicated to providing academically excellent, time-efficient, and cost-effective higher education for a diverse population of working adults for whom those opportunities may have been limited or denied. Cambridge College has sites in Cambridge, Springfield, and Lawrence, MA; Memphis, TN, Chesapeake and South Boston, VA; Augusta, GA; Ontario, CA; and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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